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Final Report: Westchester County Integrated Pest Management Educator

Submitted by: Todd Schongalla, Project Leader

The goal of the Westchester County Integrated Pest Management Educator grant was to provide staff support for the Westchester Pest Management Committee (PMC) and expand Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Westchester's IPM programming. We also hoped that the grant would provide a catalyst to the County Legislature to allocate extra funds to keep the IPM Educator working full-time for the rest of 2000 not covered in the grant. We are proud to report that the grant has led to successful IPM program delivery on all fronts. Credit is due to the grantmakers, Cornell University's Dept. of Integrated Pest Management and the NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation, for their wisdom in providing "seed money" to make this position and its many positive impacts a reality.

Rallying Support for a Westchester IPM Educator's Position

The grant enabled us to begin the hiring process before the County had finalized our budget. Knowing that we had applied for this grant, a knowledgeable and experienced candidate from within the CCE system, Joe Heller, expressed an interest in this position in October of 1999. His position as Commercial Horticulture Educator with CCE of Rockland was to be downsized from full to part-time at the end of the year. Anticipating that Joe's credentials would enable him to find full-time work relatively quickly, we accelerated the hiring process and he began work in mid-December of 1999.

Throughout the County budget hearings and negotiations in November and December, we had a strong candidate lined up for the IPM Educator's position to "sell" to our supporters. The PMC, League of Women Voters, NY State Turf & Landscape Association, CCE volunteers, and our supporters on the County Board of Legislators lobbied hard to secure funds to support funding for this position after the initial grant money ran out. No one wanted to see us refuse the grant or hire Joe for only a few months. Without this grant, we probably would not have received the additional County funds needed to fund this position for the entire year. As this report demonstrates, our supporters are now wondering how we ever managed without this position and we are building a strong track record to support this position as part of our regular County budget request.

Providing Staff Support for the Westchester County Pest Management Committee

Before Joe was hired the volunteer members of the Westchester PMC struggled to keep up with an ever-expanding workload. Joe has attended all eight PMC meetings since he was hired. He has provided minutes for each, a requirement of the original law, which

had previously proved problematic using rotating volunteers. He has done considerable "leg work" and research to facilitate and inform PMC decisions, which otherwise would have taken a lot longer or might not have been made at all. The *Tips for Maintaining a Pesticide Free Work Environment* brochure written by Joe is an example of a key educational piece that no PMC member had time to create on their own. We plan to submit it for review by Cornell's Department of Integrated Pest Management to facilitate its use throughout New York State.

At times during the previous four years, it seemed as if the workload was keeping people away from meetings. Members avoided meetings because they hadn't completed assignments from the past and those who attended regularly were penalized with more "homework" than they could handle. While there is still plenty of homework, Joe's presence has made it easier for PMC members to focus on the policymaking and advisory role that originally attracted them to the committee.

Joe's knowledge and dedication have made him a valued contributor to the PMC. When a request came from the County Executive's Office in March for a breakdown of the toxicity categories of all pesticides applied in or on county property in 1999, Joe categorized more than 300 applications made by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation. This enabled the County Executive to announce during his State of the County Speech in early April that an amendment leading to a complete phaseout of all pesticides used in or on County facilities would be forthcoming. This further positioned the PMC to play a key advisory role in crafting the pesticide phaseout amendment and plans for implementation before their public release. Without staff support, it would have taken longer to respond to the County Executive's request, the amendment might have been proposed without advice from PMC members, and the PMC's leadership in implementing further pesticide reductions could have been called into question.

Expanding Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester's IPM Programming

The IPM Educator's position has been the catalyst for a major expansion in Cornell Cooperative Extension's IPM outreach in Westchester County during a time when concern about pesticide reduction has reached an all time high. The following is a list of the IPM outreach that Joe has facilitated.

- Beginning in January, Joe worked with Todd Schongalla, IPM Educator Gary Couch, and U-Mass Professor Pat Vittum to prepare for our 4th year of biological control research on Westchester County golf courses, which is being supported by funds from the NY State IPM Program.
- Joe has been a leader in organizing Hudson Valley Horticulture programs. This highly successful collaboration among CCE educators provides programs for commercial audiences in the six counties in the lower Hudson Valley. Joe helped organize *Garden Center Employee Training* and *School IPM* both offered in March. He also organized an *IPM Update* that was cancelled by a January snowstorm, but will be offered next fall.

- From December to May, Joe participated in several meetings and numerous phone conversations with the County Executive's Chief Advisor, Larry Schwartz, and his Environmental Advisor, Robert Funicello, to discuss proposed pesticide reduction legislation, NY State DEC pesticide rules and regulations, and IPM education for homeowners.
- Joe assisted with the Cornell University Turfgrass Management Short Course which was offered for the first time in the Hudson Valley in February. He served as an instructor for labs on identifying turf varieties, weeds, and diseases.
- Joe helped organize and moderate the "Turf Management" track at the Professional Turf and Landscape Conference, which brought 1,000 participants to the Westchester County Center in January.
- Joe secured speakers and moderated the "Build Your Skills" track on basic turf management at the NY State Turfgrass Association's Southeast Conference which brought 350 participants to the Holiday Inn in Suffern in February.
- In March Joe provided pesticide training to 35 people preparing to take the NYS DEC Pesticide Certification Exam in Yorktown.
- Joe gave a presentation on *IPM Scouting and Techniques* to 60 members of the NY State Turf and Landscape Association at their March meeting.
- Joe gave a presentation on *New DEC Pesticide Licensing Regulations* at the March meeting of the Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association.
- Joe helped provide IPM information to more than 1,000 IBM researchers at two Earth Day Fairs in Thornwood and Yorktown in April.
- Joe, Todd Schongalla and County Legislator Ursula LaMotte gave ten minute presentations and answered an hour and a half of questions at a League of Women Voters sponsored forum on pesticide reduction and water quality held at the Katonah Library in April.
- Joe gave a presentation on "Environmental Lawn Care" to 32 people in May. This program was cosponsored by the Kensico Environmental Enhancement Program (KEEP) which is funded by NY City's Dept. of Environmental Protection.
- Joe helped review final drafts of the *Home Lawn Care Almanac*, which is being produced by Cornell Media Services. As soon as the Almanac and slide show are finished, he will lead efforts to train The Lawn Ranger Volunteers who will teach homeowners to reduce their use of pesticides and fertilizers on home lawns.
- Joe has developed a talk on *Pest Management Around the Home* to help homeowners reduce their use of pesticides which he will give for the first time in June.
- Joe will begin teaching a 30-hour pesticide licensing training class for BOCES employees and industry professionals in June. Some of the classes will offer recertification credits to existing license holders.
- Joe has also developed a Right-of-Way Training workshop, which will be given to ConEdison employees in June.